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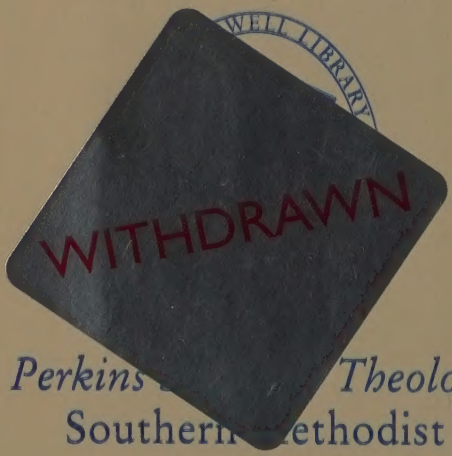

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THE DAWN OF ENGLISH DRAMA

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By

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MCMXX

Harding & More, Ltd

The Ambrosden Press, 119, High Holborn, London, W.C.1

B-2116 Tha
Gift- Mr. Lange Johnston

THE DAWN OF ENGLISH DRAMA

Greek and Roman Influences

THE glory of the sunrise, culminating in the drama of the most human of all our poets—William Shakespeare—has drawn attention away from the roses of the dawn which bloomed in the England of Geoffrey Chaucer. Yet, when Shakespeare was a boy, he must have lived among the traditions of the lights of the dawn, and been brought up with the gossip of the plays of old England sounding in his childish ears. And these early impressions which come to our childhood frequently last throughout our lives. In the case of an artist this truth is the more apparent, for in the mind of the artist we are never far from that of the child.

Among the early impressions which came to William Shakespeare, there loomed large the performance of the folk-plays of our country-side, and the sports which filled the life of the old land. Nor was the new power able to crush memories of the miracles and mysteries which marked the

calendar of old with a blend of ritual and sport. Performances of the semi-sacred plays were given through the island when Shakespeare was a growing lad, and traces of them are found in their strong influence on his work. When the greatest of our dramatists placed his hall-mark on the golden plate of our Elizabethan drama, the dawn-lights of the Middle Ages were blended with the somewhat garish sunlight of the Renaissance, fixing the limits of just proportion which give the delight of the work of our master dramatist.

Yet the traditions which came to him were in their turn the sons of tradition, and the tracing of the chain to the beginnings of our Christian stage forms a fascinating study. The books treating of the subject are costly and diffused, and the outlines of the story may come as a useful appetiser to those who wish to dive further, for whose benefit a short bibliography is appended, so that they may readily find the way to detail. On the other hand, the mere outlines of the tale will steady our outlook on the works of our great dramatist, and will draw attention to the hitherto somewhat neglected thread of influence from the life of our forefathers in the Middle Ages, an influence which has never quite departed from us, and which is now once more coming to the fore-front.

Things that pass leave their traces. When Greece had fallen politically traces of Greek art lived and gave form to Roman culture. With

the crash of the Roman Empire, the spirit of the Græco-Roman civilisation seemed the only thing that survived as a corrective to barbaric welter. Pagan forms were used in the teaching of the new religion, and traditions from the outward show of the older life were often used as instruments for the diffusion of the teaching of the new outlook on life. Of course, the nearer to the geographical centre of pagan splendour, the stronger these influences remained.

Within our own land, far away from the centre, Paganism was handed down in rough form in the sports of the people. Though the inner meaning had been completely forgotten, yet the unmeaning forms survived here and there. When the boys scampered over the village green with blackened faces they thought not at all of the soot and the sacrifice, but only of the disguise of the blackened face. When Jack of the Green came prancing in his greenery, he remembered nothing of the sacred tree, but his heart was full of his prancing and his picturesque foliage. The fool in the cow-hide no longer thought of the cow; the merriment of youth was all his affair. So the prancing was all that remained, and the merry heart went all the day long, killing the sad one which tired in a mile-a.

For, though the forms remained, the new spirit had killed the old, and life was looked upon from new and Christian eyes. Then the deeds of the people came in remembrance through the sports. May-time became one with the memories of Robin

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Hood and the sportive doings of Little John and Friar Tuck. The ways of the working man were given voice in the mumming of Tom Tyler and his wife. The Celtic note survived in the legends of the doings of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, and the later hero of action found the voice of his deeds living among the people in the famous victories of King Henry V.

The Influence of Christianity

But all this was but the foam borne on the crest of the tidal wave. It was an important, but quite minor, thread in the evolution of the drama. All these influences remained blended with the main current. For the real foundation of the modern drama we must look elsewhere, and our eyes are led to the foundations of the new life in the ritual of the Christian Church. The merry-making of the laymen became dominated by the spirit of the Church, and it is in the blending of the two that we find the form of our modern drama which gave body to the works of Shakespeare and his fellows.

Drama in the Liturgy

The pageantry and symbolism of Christian liturgy provided the basis of the serious side of our national dramatic art. The ultimate end of man's life in heaven or in hell gave a measure to the deeds which differed fundamentally from that outlook which took worldly success in this sphere as the only aim. Man's life on this earth came not only

for itself, but in its relation to the ultimate and supernatural ends. The need for the expressions of the guiding spirits of good and evil gave rise to the visions and ghosts seen on our Shakespearian stage, and to the preternatural beings of fancy, such as the witches of *Macbeth* or the fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Christianity came as the centre and the principle of existence, and the life of each popular unit was crystallised in the local church.

The passing of the year was marked in the changing liturgy. The coming of Christ was prepared for in the beginning of the Church year, and then came the first great festival of the Nativity. For twelve days the rejoicings continued, and the Twelfth Night revels have been enshrined for posterity in the comedy, not for an age, but for all time, of *Twelfth Night, or What You Will*.

Shrove-tide revels followed close on those of Christmas, and the sombre time of Lent brought the plays of the Passion and the moralities of death and penance—such as *Everyman*, etc. So we come to our Easter Morn, and the plays of the Resurrection and Whitsuntide led us on to the great dramatic festival of Corpus Christi. Then the approaching winter brought us the folk doings of All-Hallow E'en and All Saints until once more we reached Advent, and completed the circle of the passing year.

We see from the above how the circling year was

marked in old England by the changing liturgy, with its echo in secular life of the changing drama, which had drawn its inspiration from the services of the Church.

The first signs of external decoration in the liturgy came in the neums, when portions of the story of the New or the Old Testament were dwelt upon, and elaborated in embellishments of tone. Pleasure in the sensuous melody of tones came wedded to emphasis of thought and feeling, and we had the elements of dramatic speech thus noted.

Having decorated and elaborated portions of the liturgical service in voice, it was but one further step to do the same thing in pageant. Thus, by degrees, out of the liturgy there grew the miracle plays.

The earliest example which we have of these "tropes" occurs in the celebration of Easter in the tenth century. At that date we have a description of the Easter trope drawn up by Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester. Here we have a detailed description of what would in after-days become a stage direction.

We learn how four of the brethren vested themselves during the singing of the third lesson, and how one of them, clad in an alb, was directed to avoid observation—a movement for absolute dramatic effect—while he approached the sepulchre and sat, an immovable angel, palm in hand. We can then see the other three in their copes, with their thuribles in their hands, come "stepping

delicately" as though seeking something. In this manner is represented, or rather symbolised, the approach of the three women with spices to anoint the body of Jesus.

Seeing them, the angel sings, "Whom seek ye?" and they answer in song, "Jesus of Nazareth." Then the angel sings again and tells them "He is not here. He is arisen, according to prophecy." The three then, turning to the choir, announce the good news: "Alleluia! the Lord has arisen!"

But the angel calls them back singing, "Come and see the place!" Then he lifts the veil, and shows them the sepulchre with no cross therein, but only the pieces of cloth in which it had been wrapped.

So the others, going to the sepulchre, and taking the cloth, hold it up for all present to see that the Lord has indeed risen, and is no longer wrapped within the cerement. Then all sing the anthem telling of the resurrection of our Lord from the sepulchre, while the cloth is laid upon the altar. As a fitting conclusion the Prior leads the hymn of praise to the Lord—"Te Deum Laudamus"—and the clashing bells contribute to the glorifying of God.

In the above trope we have all the elements of the pageantry of drama, and it is the earliest noted example of such a form. In general principle it follows out the example of the liturgy, and keeps close to the model. All is symbolism,

and every action as well as each colour tells its own tale and serves as a stimulus to a train of thought. Thus the true art note was struck in the foundation of our drama. It is only of later growth, that abuse of costume and scenery where we see only for sensuous pleasure and think not at all of the inner meaning. Artists are few and far between, and, as the drama later got into the hands of mere showmen and not of artists, the original and true functions of the elements which go to the making of plays became forgotten and obliterated. But from time to time artists came to the fore, and, with the work of the true artist, there ever came the emphasis of the inner life rather than the outer, thus going back to the fundamental function.

In William Fitzstephen's *Life of St. Thomas à Becket*, written in the third decade of the twelfth century, we read of the superiority of the "holier plays" of London over those of ancient Rome. So we have an indirect testimony of the custom, even at this early date, of the performance of miracle plays among our ancestors.

Thus we see how, in the intervening centuries, the drama had grown from the emphasis of parts of the Church liturgy forming, in its way, part of the service, to the co-operation of the lay folk, and the migration of the sacred dramas from the precincts of the sanctuary into the body of the church, and then from the body of the church to the churchyard without, where the folk would gather

to hear the great sermons. When the Franciscans came preaching to the people they used from the first every means of bringing their message in living form to the imaginations of their auditory, and we hear of St. Francis of Assisi himself having the representation of the Nativity shown to the people, with living people, a living child, and the ox and the ass in their own bodies. Here we have, in the thirteenth century, at an altar in a forest, a representation which appealed as actual life—a beginning of the art which afterwards developed as an open-air play. Limiting our view to sacred subjects, we see the same thing in far later ages in the Passion Play at Ober-Ammergau.

From merely looking at such representations in a church, and being sympathetic listeners, the people, filled with enthusiasm of the theme, burned to do something in the same kind themselves, and so brought the plays from the church to the churchyard, and from the churchyard to the market-place. In this manner came the transition from the pageantry of liturgical embroidery to the lay drama.

The Beginnings of Secular Drama

As the pageants turned to plays, the element of contrast became necessary. In order to throw up the story of Christianity in dramatic light, the opposite—the cult of the devil—also had need of presentation.

Now the devil cult exposed in horror was hardly

the way to encourage crowds to spend a pleasant afternoon. But the love of the people for sports and pastimes, and the lingering of old traditions in the country, had blended the ceremonies of a pre-Christian religion with the folk amusements. Thus what was once a pre-Christian liturgy came now as a simple sport, and, though many of the old customs were retained, yet the reason which had given rise to these practices became entirely forgotten.

A fine revenge on the devil might be scored by pouring ridicule upon him, and this method would at the same time serve the purpose of giving amusement to the audience by allowing them something to laugh at. At the same time it would serve as a contrast and rest after the intensity and seriousness of a scene of sacred pageantry, and find a refreshed and newly aroused audience for the repetition of the sacred theme in its development.

So came the creation of the Vice, and the drama was born with the devil. The discovery was in the value of contrast, and its essential part, in fact the main element, of dramatic art. Though the sacred story became distorted and destroyed in the course of human progress, yet the Vice lived on until his final appearance in personal form in the character of little Devil Doubt in the mumming plays throughout the country-side in England.

The Guilds

Drama came with the contrast of good and evil. It lived on through the miracle plays, and the

later morality plays, and gave its tradition as a foundation for the Shakespearian drama, and descended to us in the everlasting popularity of melodramas, so called. We may see the same contrast in the details of our sacred buildings of the Middle Ages, and we may feel it daily in the laughter and tears of life. The organisation and performance of our great cycles of dramas through the Middle Ages was in the hands of the Guilds—those very same bodies which gave us, in another direction, the beautiful prayers in stone which stand as memorials of the time in our cathedrals.

To enter into the history of the Guilds in detail would be too large a task for our present sketch. But all through the evolution of our national form of drama our eyes are naturally straying to the work of Shakespeare, as it is in their triumphant apotheosis in his work that the early traditions are ever kept alive.

We may, then, turn once more to the home of the Warwickshire poet, and examine as a type the articles of foundation of a Guild in his own town.

In *The Gentleman's Magazine* there appeared, in the year 1835, an article on the records of the Gilde of Holy Cross of our Lady the Blessed Mary and St. John Baptist at Stratford-upon-Avon. The author of the article chides Dugdale for not having given, in his *Warwickshire*, the full account as shown by the records. For, although Dugdale traces the history of the Gilde to the time of King Henry IV, yet the records show entries back in

the reign of Edward I. But the Gilde was then termed simply The Gilde of Holy Cross, and there were attached to it the two fraternities of Our Lady and St. John Baptist, the three bodies being afterwards embodied in one Gilde. In its beginning the Gilde of Holy Cross obtained the use of a place called the Rede Hall as its place of meeting, and thus was originated the Gilde Hall of Stratford-upon-Avon.

But an old folio ledger was discovered. It is of stout writing-paper browned by time, the sections stitched on thick thongs of leather. It is bound with two pieces of oak plank covered with hide, and richly rolled and stamped with roses and dragons. The title of the book is *The Ledger of the Gilde of the Holy Cross, our Lady, and Seynt John the Baptist, of Stratford-upon-Avone.* Looking through the contents, we are enabled, through the records of pains, penalties, and observances, to see with the mind's eye the outlines of the life of a Gilde of old. Shakespeare must have known of this Gilde, and been brought up as a boy among the traditional glories of the old town life of his grandfather's days.

The primary object was stated to be "the safety after death of the souls of the faithful." With this object in view they erected the Gilde Chapel in the High Street of Stratford-upon-Avon. Here many masses for the souls of the departed "bretheryn" and "susteryn" were said. Processions were made to the chapel from time to

time, and the accounts show that much pageantry took place at these. There was also a civil jurisdiction connected with the Gilde for the policing of the town, and for the settlement of disputes among the members. For, by the articles of association, members were forbidden to go to law among themselves without the consent of the master and aldermen. Charity, of course, came within the scope of the Gilde's activities, and the providing of houses or habitations in the alms-houses for those who became bereft of money. Education was also within the sphere of its activities. There is a deed of the time of King Edward IV, which serves as an example of work in this respect, and regulates the endowment of a free grammar school, under the control and superintendence of the master and aldermen.

Good fellowship counted among the objects, and friendly meetings were arranged from time to time. At the annual "Communion" all members took part in a great procession, each wearing the hood of the "delivery"—hence the word "livery"—of the Gilde.

After the pageantry the tables were spread. The parks of neighbouring squires had been requisitioned, horsemen had been sent in all directions in search of dainties, and to the sea-coast for fish. No pains were spared in the providing of a good banquet.

New "bretheryn" and "susteryn" were welcomed to the ranks, and those who could not pay

in money did so with personal service. Thus were traders, manufacturers, and dealers admitted, paying their way in lieu of money with the erection or repair of buildings, or the donations of supplies for days of feasting and rejoicing.

Among the distinguished members of the Gilde were George, Duke of Clarence, Isabel his wife, and Edward, Lord Warwick, and Margaret, their children.

But the main object of the Gilde had never been forgotten, and the souls of departed persons were frequently made members of the institution. Thus we find the quaint entry, even so late as the time of Henry VIII, among members—"The soule of Thomas, foole in the family of the Lady Anne Graye." Females were only admitted as members when they were in contemplation of matrimony. One such applicant was entered on the books, for reasons unknown, as "Matilda super montem."

The Morality Plays

These side-lights on the constitution of the Gilde seem to bring us in touch with the homely, brotherly feeling of old, and very near to the folks who contributed so much to the building of our cathedrals, and who supplied the actors for the miracle plays of the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries, which handed down to William Shakespeare the main tradition on which he founded his work for the new-born stage.

Close to the spot where now is Shakespeare's

monument in Stratford Church is the arch of a doorway which once led to a charnel-house (compare *Romeo and Juliet*, Act IV, Scene iii, lines 34 to 45). The sculptured corbels of the arch were carved to represent St. Christopher and the Resurrection. In the other sculpture are the instruments of the Passion, and three sleeping soldiers. There was once a figure of our Lord ascending, but in both cases the figure of Christ has been mutilated. Similar figures were found on the spandrels of a doorway in the Chapel of the Holy Trinity erected by the Gilde of the Holy Cross in the centre of Stratford town. In both cases we are in the presence of the subject of a miracle play in stone, afterwards repeated in words.

Had we turned up the seats of the stalls in Shakespeare's church we should have come across some elements of low comedy, such as formed the relief in the miracle plays. For we might there see St. George and the dragon, with the kneeling princess, a lady in a mitre head-dress with a unicorn on her lap (the emblem of chastity), with a huntsman just arriving with spear. Then we see a woman holding her husband by the beard and basting him with a ladle, and farther on a scuffle between a man and a woman, she with her distaff, and he crowned with a stag's antler (like Sir John Falstaff in the forest of Windsor).

Can we not see the boy Shakespeare in such a church and surrounded by such traditions of the work of the Gilde of other days, taking in impres-

sions and dreaming dreams which afterwards became embodied in his work ?

Nor was this atmosphere of mingled humanity and Christianity, with all its allusions to the ever-present supernatural, a merely national note. It was the glamour of the Renaissance which obscured it for a time—and only for a time—in France. The origin of the French theatre may be traced to a similar Gilde in the work of the Confraternity of the Passion, and behind them to the work of Jean Bodel and Rutebeuf in the thirteenth century, and the drama of *Adam*—the oldest drama of all—in the twelfth century. This first play was played upon a scaffold erected against the church wall, and the impersonator of God the Father, when not occupied upon the stage, retired within the church.

But the first body to have a theatre of their own in France were the Brothers of the Passion, who appeared in the fourteenth century. It was to them that Charles VI gave—in 1402—the monopoly for the playing of miracle plays at Paris. They first played in the hospice of the Trinity, which served as an inn for those pilgrims who arrived at Paris after the closing of the gates. In 1539 the Brothers moved from the hospice of the Trinity to the Hôtel de Flandres, and in 1548 they went from there to the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Here they remained until the edict of Parliament in 1548 forbade the further performance of sacred plays. Then came the era of purely secular plays,

and the tragedies of Racine first found their home among the brothers of the Passion. As in England, so in France, before the Renaissance we find the theatre fed by dramatised versions of the liturgy, or of pieces founded on the liturgy, on the one hand, and by comedy performances of the Brothers of Joy, or low comedians, who were probably the originators of the Feast of Fools, on the other. The blending of the two gave us a form of art with strong contrasts—and therefore truly dramatic—in the one case, as the blending of folk-lore with dramatised liturgy gave us the wonderful cycles of anonymous miracle plays in the other. But, whereas in France the glamour of the Renaissance carried Racine to the imitation of the form of the classics, in England the tradition of the folk-lore triumphed, for it became embodied in the work of the greatest of the poet-dramatists.

Of the English miracle plays we possess four main cycles—the York, the Towneley, the Chester, and the Coventry. Of these four cycles we may take the first on our list, and the last to be printed, as the most valuable example. These forty-eight plays, coming down to us from the middle of the fourteenth century, give a fairly full dramatisation of the Bible story, both in the Old Testament and the New, and the mere list of them shows the part which the trade Gildes took in the arrangement and performance. For we have here the tanners showing a dramatised version of the story of the creation, with the fall of Lucifer and the rebel

angels, and the plasterers showing the creation of the earth as the tanners have done of the heavens. The creation of Adam and Eve is shown by the card-makers, whereas the fullers show how God forbade them to eat of the Tree of Life. Then the coopers show us how the serpent, coming from behind a tree, deceived Adam and Eve with apples, and how God cursed the serpent, and drove our first parents with a sword from Paradise. Then the armourers show how an angel brought a distaff to Eve and a spade to Adam, and taught the first unemployed how to work. The glovers take us to Abel and Cain offering sacrifice, and very naturally the ship-wrights represent God's warning to Noah to make an ark which will float. The ark is handed over to the fishmongers and marines, and we are introduced to Noah's three sons with their wives, and to the animals. Next come the parchment-makers and book-binders with Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, and the hosiers with Moses in the wilderness. The spicers voice the sayings of the prophets as to the birth of our Lord, and show the Annunciation and the visit of the Blessed Virgin to Elizabeth, and the pewterers give us scenes between the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, with the visit of the angel warning them to go to Bethlehem. Then come the tylers with the story of the first Christmas, and the chandlers as shepherds who see the star in the east. An angel links, with his discourse, these two pageants. Then come the goldsmiths,

gold-beaters, and money-makers, giving us the adoration of the Magi, the masons, with Mary, Joseph, and Simeon, the shoers of horses presenting the flight into Egypt, the girdellers, nailers, and sawyers presenting the massacre of the Innocents, the bridle-makers showing Christ in the Temple, the barbers with the baptism of our Lord by St. John, and the vintners with the very natural choice of the marriage feast. The smiths have allotted to them the temptation of our Lord by Satan, the curriers the transfiguration, the ironmongers the washing of the feet, the plumbers the woman taken in adultery, the pouch-makers, bottlers and cap-makers Lazarus in the tomb, Mary Magdalene, and Martha. The skinners bring us to the coming of Christ on an ass with twelve apostles following, six rich and six poor men, eight boys with branches of palms singing "Benedictus," and Zaccheus climbing into a sycamore-tree.

So the story is continued with the cutlers, bladesmiths, sheathers, scalers, buckle-makers, horners, bakers, cord-wainers, bowyers, arrow-featherers, tapisers, couchers, littesters, cooks, water-loaders, tile-makers, millers, turners, workers in horse-hair, bowl-makers, tunners, pinners, lateners and painters, butchers, poulterers, saddlers, glaziers, makers of saddle-trees, carpenters, winedrawers, brokers, woolpackers, escriveners, illuminators, pardoners, refurbishers of cloths, tailors, potters, drapers, linen-weavers, weavers of wool, hosiers,

and mercers with the final tableau of Jesus, Mary, twelve Apostles, four angels with trumpets and four with a crown, a lance and two scourges; four good spirits and four evil spirits, and six devils.

In all this we see a typical example of the many activities of an industrial city united in one great ideal. It has been said that human nature was not perfect in the Middle Ages, any more than now; but, although some persons may have failed in completely following the ideal, at least it was there. Surely it is better to aim at a measure of perfection, even though we fail to keep it.

Closely allied to the York cycle came that of Wakefield, commonly known as the Towneley Plays, from the manuscript having lain for long with that family, Local colour abounds in these. Not only is Wakefield itself alluded to, but even small villages such as Horbury, a few miles from the town. Many additions have brought the manuscript up to the fifteenth century, and much rollicking humour abounds side by side with the Scripture narrative.

These two northern cycles are the most important. But we also have the Chester cycle of Whitsun plays. These seem to have been played by the local trade Guilds at this season, whereas the York plays were enacted at the time of Corpus Christi. In the fourth cycle of so-called Coventry plays we find a trace of the company having gone on tour, for the prologue ends with these lines:

"A Sunday next, yf that we may,
At six of the belle, we gynne our play
In N—— towne."

Critics seem inclined to attribute the plays to the East Midlands, and we find in them many analogies to the moralities. The dramatisation of abstract ideas comes into play, as in Contemplacio taking the place of the Doctor or Expositor, the personification of Death, and the appearance of Veritas, Misericordia, Justicia, and Pax.

In these four great cycles we find the basis of our collection of miracle plays which have come down to us, and we may trace the most important of these to York. But through the fourteenth, fifteenth, and part of the sixteenth centuries we find miracle plays enacted throughout the country.

During the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries we find miracle plays played by the Guilds at London, Dunstable, Cambridge, Canterbury, Winchester, Worcester, Sleaford, Leicester, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Bassingbourne, Bethersden (Kent), Heybridge (Essex), Wymondham (Norfolk), Reading, Lincoln, Shrewsbury, Tewkesbury, Witney (Oxfordshire), Preston, Lancaster, Kendal, York, Beverley, Wakefield, Coventry, Chester, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Dublin, Norfolk, or Suffolk, Croxton, Cornwall.

We see from the above that the whole country of England, as well as Scotland and Ireland, was filled with performances of miracle plays from about

fifty years after the death of Chaucer to shortly before the coming of William Shakespeare to London. The great folk theatre of the English people was playing local variations of the same repertoire through all the land. That our poet-dramatist, coming from the people in the very heart of our land, should be affected by the tradition of three hundred years of growth of such an art was to be expected.

The form was a mixture and contrast of sacred theme and low comedy interlude, and it is this very form which distinguishes the work of Shakespeare, and which so shocked the critics of the eighteenth century with their formalist ideas of the classical unities. One glaring instance which gave them umbrage was the drunken porter in *Macbeth*. Yet he had his counterpart in the mystery plays of York.

In the *Cutteleres York Play* of the conspiracy to take Jesus, Judas, knocking at the gate of Pilate's hall, says :

> "Do open, porter, the porte of this prowd place.
> That I may pass to your Princes
> To prove for your prowe [good]."

To which the janitor, opening, replies :

> "Go hence, thou glorand gedlyng [staring vagabond]
> God give thee ill grace.
> Thy glances show so grimly
> My heart in fright doth grow."

Then Judas :

"Good sir, be toward this time,
And tarry not my trace,
For I have tidings to tell."

And the janitor answers :

"Aye, some treason I trow,
For I feel by a figure in your false face,
It is but folly to feast affection in you.
For Mars he hath morteysed his mark,
After all lines of my lore,
And says ye are wicked of work,
And both a strange thief and a stark."

This is modernised to a certain extent, but otherwise is an exact quotation of the original text.

A good example of the treatment of a sacred scene may be taken from the tile-thatchers' play in the York Mysteries. The play treats of the journey to Bethlehem, and the birth of Jesus. The persons of the play are Joseph and Mary, and the scene is laid in a cattle-shed in Bethlehem.

JOSEPH

Almighty God in Trinity,
I pray thee, Lord, for Thy great might,
Unto Thy simple servant see,
Her in this place where we are pight,
Ourselves alone :
Lord grant us good harbour this night
Within this wone [habitation]
For we have sought both up and down,

Through diverse streets in this city.
So many people come to town
That we can nowhere harboured be
There is such press.
Forsooth I can no succour see
But we must bide with beasts.
And if we here all night abide,
We shall be stormed in this steede [place].
The walls are down on either side
The roof is ruined above our head,
As have I ree [rest]
Say, Marie daughter, what is thy rede?
How shall we do?
For in great need now are we sted,
As thou thyself the sooth may see,
For here is neither cloth nor bed,
And we are weak and all weary.
And fayne would rest.
Now gracious God, for Thy mercy!
Teach us the best.

MARY

God will teach us, full wise is He.
Therefore, Joseph, be of good cheer,
For in this place born will He be
That shall us save from sorrows sere,
Both even and morn.
Sir, wit ye well the time is near,
He will be born.

JOSEPH

Then behoves us bide here still,
Here in this place all this night.

MARY

Aye, sir, forsooth, it is God's will.

JOSEPH

Then I would fayn we had some light
What so befall.
It waxes right murk unto my sight,
And cold withal.
I will go get us light for-thy,
And fuel find with me to bring.

(Goes out.)

MARY

Almighty God you govern and gy,
As He is sovereign of all thing
For His great might,
And lend me grace to His loving
That I me dight.
Now in my soul great joy have I,
I am all clad in comfort clear,
Now all be borne of my body
Both God and man together in feere.
Blest may He be!

* * * * *

Jesu! my Son that is so dear,
New borne is He. (Mary worships the Child.)
Hail, my lord God! Hail, Prince of peace!
Hail my Father, and hail my Son!
Hail sovereign seat all sinns to cease!
Hail God and Man in earth to wenne [dwell]!
Hail! through whose might
All this world was first be-gonne,
Merkness and light.
Son, as I am simple subject of thine,
Vouchsafe, sweet Son I pray thee,
That I might Thee take in these arms of mine,
And in this poor weed to array Thee;
Grant me this bliss!
As I am Thy mother chosen to be
In soothfastness.

The scene then changes to outside the hut, and Joseph is suddenly surrounded with a great light, and wonders what it means. As he enters the shed the scene once more shifts to the interior. Joseph asks of Mary what sweet thing is that on her knee, and Mary, answering, explains the great light as that of the star which has been foretold at the birth of Christ. Saint Joseph then worships the Divine Child in lines which are the purest poetry—that of the people :

JOSEPH

Now welcome flower, fairest of hue,
I shall Thee honour with main and might,
Hail ! my Maker, Hail Christ Jesu !
Hail, royal King, root of all right !
Hail, Saviour !
Hail, my Lord, shedder of Light !
Hail, blessed flower !

MARY

Now Lord, that all this world shall win,
To Thee, my Son, is that I say,
Here is no bed to lay Thee in,
Therefore, my dear Son, I Thee pray
Since it is soe,
Here in this crib I might Thee lay
Between the beasts two.
And I shall wrap Thee, mine own dear Child,
With such clothes as we have here.

JOSEPH

O Mary ! behold those beasts mild,
They make loving in their mannere
As they were men.

Forsooth it seems well be their cheer
Their Lord they ken.

MARY

Their Lord they ken, that know I well
They worship Him with might and main:
The weather is cold, as ye may feel,
To hold Him warm they are full fain.
With their warm breath,
And breathe on Him, is nought to layne,
To warm Him with.
O!—now sleeps my Son, blessed may He be
And lies full warm the beasts between.

JOSEPH

O now is fulfilled, forsooth I see,
That Abacuc in mind did mean
And preached by prophecy.
He said Our Saviour shall be seen
Between the beasts to lye:
And now I see the same in sight.

MARY

Aye, sir, forsooth the same is He.

JOSEPH

Honour and worship both day and night
Everlasting Lord be done to Thee
Always, as is worthy,
And, Lord, to Thy service I oblige me
With all my heart holy.

MARY

Thou merciful Maker, most mighty,
My God, my Lord, my Son so free,
Thy handmaiden forsooth am I.

And to Thy service I oblige me
With all mine heart entire,
Thy blessing beseech I Thee,
Thou grant us all in choir.

In some contrast to this may be taken the two Shepherds' plays in their homely plots as found in the Towneley collection. In the first the first shepherd opens by a speech in envy of the dead, who are freed from all trouble. For in all this world sorrow follows play and poverty riches. Jack Cope must now walk where he would have ridden in the old days. Sheep die, rents are due, and there is no money to pay them with. Other sheep are lost, and he must go fairing to buy more. Then the second shepherd comes in with a blessing and a prayer to save us all from boasters and braggarts, who are as proud as lords, with fine heads of hair and grim bearing. "God mend them and end them" is his prayer. Then the shepherds address one another by name. "Good morning, Gyb," says one. "Who is that? John Horne?" says the other. Gyb says he is faring as badly as any man in the kingdom, and Horne agrees that the poor are in the ditch. Gyb then starts quoting proverbs—"A man may not marry and thrive all in a year." Horne agrees that we must creep ere we go. Then they quarrel. Gyb says he is going to buy sheep. Horne says "Where shall you feed them?" Gyb, imagining he has the sheep, tells the bell-wether to go on. They call out imaginary orders to the sheep, and

Gyb says he will break Horne's head. Slow-pace, the third shepherd, then comes in and chaffs them. They are two old knaves not worth a pound between them, fighting for nothing, like Moll, who, while counting her sheep, found she had broken her pitcher, and had but one sheep all the time. He shakes an empty sack, and says that is the symbol of their wits. Then Jack, the boy, comes in and tells them they bear the bell of all fools from heaven to hell. Gyb proposes a drink, but Horne says they must eat first. So they sit down to dinner. Horne brings out a boar's brawn, Gyb a cow's foot, a sow's shank, and blood puddings. Horne then brings from his bag an ox-tail, a pie, two swine's jaws, and part of a hare, while Slow-pace contributes a goose's leg, pork, partridge, tart, and a calf's liver.

Then they drink good ale, and chaff and sing, collect the broken meats for the poor, and prepare to sleep. Slow-pace says a night-spell, they sleep, and then they are awakened by the song of the angels—" A Child is born at Bethlehem."

The second Shepherds' play in the Towneley collection goes still further in the direction of farce with the shepherds. For Mack, the sheep-stealer, joins the other shepherds, saying, as he comes in, that he wishes he were in heaven where no bairns weep. Asked after his wife, he tells how she eats him out of house and home. He brags of his prowess until they sleep. Then Mack steals a sheep and brings it to his old wife Gill. Knocking at his

door, his wife says she is busy with her distaff, and cannot attend to him. Later she recognises his voice and lets him in. He wants to make a meal of the sheep at once, but she says he is bound to be found out, and will hang for all this at last. However they decide between them to lay the sheep's carcase in the cradle as a new-born child, and Mack goes back.

Mack pretends to sleep with the others, and when they awake he advises them to see that none of their sheep are stolen. So they disperse and the discovery is made of the missing animal. They all accuse Mack and go to his house. But nothing is discovered there but the wife and child in the bed and cradle. They all apologise to Mack, and one says he must go and kiss the new-born child. Despite Mack's efforts at prevention he goes to the cradle, and, taking down the coverlet, discovers the snout of the lost sheep. Notwithstanding their anger they cannot help laughing, and afterwards they all sleep. Then the angels' song is heard, and all must go to Bethlehem.

The above show the fearless extent to which contrast was carried. The later play of the Shearmen and Tailors of Coventry, gives us an example of amalgamation, as in this instance the action of one short play extends from the prophecy of Isaiah, through the story of the first Christmas, to the massacre of the Innocents, while the low comedy and bombast is plentifully interspersed in the persons of Herod and his associates.

THE TOWN CRIER

We have seen how the earlier miracle plays emerged from the church into the churchyard, being played on a scaffold abutting on the church wall, and so into the market-place, and through the streets of the town, where the pageants were set up in front of the houses of the principal citizens, or of those who had contributed certain sums towards the expenses of the festival.

These pageants were probably two, if not three, stories in height, and the performers had stages for the different aspects of life—in heaven, on earth, or in hell.

The town crier announced the performance and a specimen proclamation has come down to us from the year 1415—fifteen years after Chaucer's death. It gives such a good general idea that it is worth quoting. In modern English it runs thus:

PROCLAMATION OF THE CORPUS CHRISTI PLAYS, MADE ON THE VIGIL OF CORPUS CHRISTI

"*OYEZ, Oiez, Oiez! We command on the King's behalf, and the Mayer and sheriffs of this City, that no man go armed in this City with swords or with cartil-axes, nor no other defences in disturbance of the King's peace, and the play, or hindering of the procession of Corpus Christi, and that they leave their harness in their inns, the knights and squires of worship that aye have their swords borne after them, on pain of forfeiture of their weapon*

and imprisonment of their bodies. And that men that bring forth pageants that they play at the places assigned therefore, and nowhere else, on the pain of forfeiture to be raised that is ordained therefore, that is to say eleven shillings. And that men of crafts and all other men that find torches, that they come forth in array and in the manner that has been used and customed before this time, none having weapons, carrying tapers of the pageants. And officers that are keepers of the peace on pain of forfeiture of their franchise and their bodies to prison. And all manner of craftsmen that bring forth their pageants in order and course by good players, well arrayed and openly speaking, upon pain of losing of one hundred shillings to be paid to the chamber without any pardon. And that every player that shall play be ready in his pageant at convenient time, that is to say, at the mid hour between four and five of the clock in the morning, and then all other pageants fast following one after the other as their course is, without tarrying."

But as well as the plays on pageants in the towns we had the use of elaborate open-air stages. In the copy which has come down to us of *The Castle of Perseverance* we have a detailed drawing of the open-air *mise en scène* of this, our earliest morality.

The drawing shows a rude representation of a castle, raised on supports, and standing in the centre of a double circle. In the space between the circles is written, " This is the water about the place. If any dyke may be made it shall be played,

or else that it be strongly barred all about. And let not over many marshalmen be within the place." Over the castle is written, "This is the castel of perseverance that standeth in the midst of the place. But let no man sit there for letting of sit, for there shall be the best of all." Beneath the castle, within the supports, stands a bed, below which are the words, "Mankind's bed shall be under the castle, and there shall the soul lie under the bed till he shall rise and play." On each side of the castle is written, "Coveytyse cupboard shall be at the end of the castel, by the beds feet." On the outside of the circle five stations for scaffolds are marked out. Beginning at the top, we read, "South Care scaffold—West Mundus scaffold—North Belial scaffold—North East Coveytyse scaffold—East Deus scaffold," while underneath we have the following stage directions: "He that shall play belial, look that he have gunpowder burning in pipes in his hands, and in his ears when he goeth to battle. . . . The four daughters shall be clad in mantles, Mercy in white, Righteousness in red altogether, Truth in sad green, and Peace in black, and they shall play in the place all together until they bring up the soul."

The play begins with a conference between the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, and then Humanum Genus comes forth from under the bed. Humanum Genus later enters the Castle of Perseverance, where he is besieged by the Seven Deadly Sins and defended by the Virtues. At last Mankind

is tempted forth from the Castel by the wiles of Coveytyse. He is rewarded with a thousand marks but a little later learns his folly on the arrival of Garcio, his heir, who demands from him everything he has. But his good angel once more draws near to his side. There is a dispute between Misericordia, Veritas, Justicia, and Pax, but God the Father ("Pater sedens in trone") admits Mankind to mercy, and the play ends with a warning to the spectators: "Ever at the beginning, think on your last ending." This, with the further example of "Everyman," which is ascribed to the middle of the fifteenth century, give us types of the morality plays, which were growing up alongside the miracles, and were to outlive them. But soon after the morality plays and the interludes filled the stage, we reached the time of the sunrise, and the old traditions came to the fore once more in the genius of William Shakespeare.

As this sketch of the growth of our drama began with a description of the first dramatic development of the liturgical celebration of Easter, it may fitly conclude with an example of an old Easter play. Granted reverent care in its preparation, *Resurreccio Domini* might well be given in any large hall. A few such plays have already been staged, but many remain in obscurity which, if properly produced, would appeal strongly to a modern audience, not only on account of the religious beauty and truth enshrined within them, but also because of their humanity and literary quaintness.

"RESURRECCIO DOMINI"

From the Towneley Plays

Although the text has been sufficiently modernised to render it easy of comprehension to the ordinary man of to-day, yet the rhythm and rhyme have been kept as in the original, as also the order of speaking of the characters. In order that the modern production of such a play may be encouraged, hints are given here and there to this end.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

PILATUS
CAYAPHAS
CENTURION
ANNA
PRIMUS MILES
SECUNDUS MILES
TERCIUS MILES
QUARTUS MILES
ANGELI, PRIMUS ET SECUNDUS
JHESUS
MARIA MAGDALENE
MARIA JACOBI
MARIA SALOMEE

The play may be given on the platform of any hall, and the necessary stage conditions obtained by the use of two sets of curtains placed according to the subjoined diagram.

A.....B
C..... D..... .....E.....F
G .....H .... I.....J
K.....L

Let the line A B *represent the back of a platform. The space* A C *represents one-third of the platform's depth, the remaining thirds being* C G *and* G K.

At C F *is stretched our first line of curtains,* C D *and* E F *being two side-curtains, each about three feet wide. From* D *to* E *are stretched the tableau curtains to overlap in the centre, and of a width to suit the hall.*

At two-thirds of the depth of the platform there is stretched from G *to* J *the second set of curtains arranged in manner similar to those stretching from* C *to* F.

K L *represents the front of the platform, the remaining third of the depth from* G *to* K *forming the apron stage. The curtains should be of an opaque material of a grey colour, so that the costumes of the performers should stand against it in bold relief.*

C D G H *and* E F I J *should be joined with cross-pieces top and bottom, so as to form two squares, and thus take the pull of the curtains hanging in the centre.*

Properties, such as Pilate's Rostrum and Throne, stools, etc., and the Sepulchre should be made for the play ; and the costumes should be designed from fifteenth-century representations of Scriptural subjects.

The actual representation of our Lord should be very carefully treated, with great reverence, and omitted altogether where there is the slightest doubt.

As a heading to the front curtains there may be stretched an entablature of white material two feet deep. This is bordered with a gold frame of braid. On it is displayed, in golden "Gothic" letters, the name of the piece.

In the present case the heading would read :

"RESURRECCIO DOMINI"

The front tableaux, rising, discover Pilate's Court

PILATUS

Peace, I warn you, Lords of wit !
Go ! Stand aside, or else go sit,

For there are men who move not yet,
And lords of shining might!
We think to abide, and not to flit
I tell ye, every wight.

Spare your speech, ye wretches bold,
And cease your cry till I have told
What that my worship would,
Here, on these stones:
Whoso to my commands is cold
Full high shall hang his bones.

Know ye not I am Pilate,
That sat upon the Justice late,
At Calvary where I was at
This day at morn?
I am he before whose state
The culprit was late borne.

Now since that loathly wretch is dead
I have great joy in my manhede,
Therefore would I in this sted
That it were tayn heed,
If any follow where He led
Or worse, His law would lead,

He shall know that cruelly
His life is lost, and that shortly
Twere better he should hang full high
On gallow tree,
Therefore the prelates should espy
If such there be.

As I am man of might the most,
If there be any blow such boast,
With torments keen shall he pay the cost
For evermore :
The devil to hell shall harry his ghost,
But I say no more.

CAYAPHAS

Sir, dread ye nothing on either hand.
The Centurion, I understand
Your knight, is left to take his stand
Right there, to wende :
We left him there as man most wise,
If any ribalds would arise,
To bring them to the next assize,
And there to make an end.

[*Enter the* CENTURION *and the soldiers. On Apron Stage.*

The Tableau Curtains Fall

CENTURION

Oh, blessed Lord God on high !
What should this marvell signify
That here was shown so openly
Unto our sight,
When the righteous man did die
That Jhesus hight ?

Heaven shook with dreadful moan,
The shining ceased of Sun and Moon,
And the dead men rose up soon
Out of a grave
And then the stone walls 'gan to groan,
Asunder burst, and gave.

There was seen, in a sudden sight,
Our Princes, forsooth, did nothing right,
And so I said to them in height,
As it is true,
That He was most of might,
The Son of God, Jhesu.

Fowles in air and fish in flood,
That day changed their mood,
When that He was rent on rood,
That Lord veray:
Full well they understood
That He was slain that day.
Therefore will I turn about,
To them fast will I ride
That I may learn without a doubt
What they will say this tide
Of this affray:
I will no longer now abide
But fast ride on my way.

The tableau curtains rise, showing Pilate's Court. Enter the CENTURION

CENTURION

God save you, sirs, on every side!
Worship and wealth in the world so wide!

PILATUS

Centurio, welcome, this tide,
Our comely knight!

CENTURION

God grant you grace you for to guide
And rule you right.

PILATUS

Centurio, welcome, draw near to hand!
Tell us tidings here among,
For ye have gone throughout our land,
Ye know each hill.

CENTURION

Sir, I fear me ye have done wrong
And wander ill.

CAYAPHAS

Wander ill? I pray thee why?
Declare that to this company.

CENTURION

So shall I, sir, full surely,
With all my main:
I mean the righteous Man thereby
Whom ye have slain.

PILATUS

Centurio, cease of such saw ;
Ye are a great man of our law,
And if we should witness draw
To us excuse,
Ye must maintain us evermore,
And nought refuse.

CENTURION

To maintain truth is well worthy :
I said when I did see Him die,
That it was God's Son almighty,
Whom we adore :
So say I yet and bide thereby,
For evermore.

ANNA

Ye, sir, such reasons may ye rue,
Thou shouldst not speak in such notes new,
But thou comest of tokens true
To us to tell.

CENTURION

Such wonderful case ne'er yet ye knew
As then befell.

CAYAPHAS

We pray thee tell us of that thing.

CENTURION

The elements did seem to sing,
And sadly made a great mourning,
In sudden grief:
They knew by countenance that their King
Was done to death.

The sun for woe it waxed all wan,
The shine of moon and stars had gone,
And earth it trembled as a man
Began to speak:
The stone, that ne'er was stirred, began
To burst in twain and break:
And dead men rose up bodily, both great and small.

PILATUS

Centurio, beware withall!
Ye know that clerks "eclipse" this call
This sudden sight:
When sun and moon a season shall
Lack of their light.

CAYAPHAS

Sir, if that dead men rise up bodily,
That may be done by sorcery,
Therefore nothing we set thereby,
That thou hast told.

CENTURION

Sir, that I saw truly,
That shall I evermore hold.

Not only how the stones did work,
Not only that the sun wax murk,
But how the wail rose in the kirk,
I know full well.

PILATUS

Such tales, wherein dark shadows lurk,
Thou shouldst not tell.

Harlot! Why comest thou us among
With news to set us in the wrong?
Wend forth! full high mightst thou now hang,
Vile traitor!

CAYAPHAS

Wend forth, and still thine idle song,
And hold thy clatter.

CENTURION

Sirs, since ye bid me thus to go
Have now good day!
God give you all the grace to know
The truth alway.

[*Exit* CENTURION.

ANNA

Withdraw thee fast, so full of dread,
For we shall well maintain our deed.

PILATUS

Such reasons as he seems to read
Were never borne.

CAYAPHAS

To sound this note there's no more need
Either even or morn.

But, since he hath brought ill cheer
That afterward may cost us dear,
Therefore, sirs, whilst ye are here,
Among us all,
Let us now see if his fear
Will stand or fall.

For Jhesus said full openly
Unto the men that were hard by
A thing that troubled all Jury,
And right so may,
That He should rise up bodily
Within the third day.

If it be so as He hath said,
The latter deed is more to dread
Than was the first, if we take heed
And tend thereto.
Advise ye, sirs, for there is need,
The best to do.

ANNA

Sir, nevertheless if He said so,
He has no might to rise and go,
But His disciples shall steal His corse and go
And bear it away;
That were to us, and others also
A foul affray.

Then would the people say everyone
That He were risen Himself alone,
Therefore order ye that the stone
The knights defend,
Till these three days be come and gone
And brought to end.

PILATUS

Now, certes, sir, full well ye say,
And for this same point to gainsay,
I shall, if that so I may:
He shall not rise,
Nor none shall win Him thence away
In any wise.

Sir knights, that are of deeds doughty,
And chosen for chief of chivalry,
As I may on you rely,
By day and night,
Go and keep Jhesus body
With all your might:

And as far as in you lay,
Keep Him until the third day.
Let no traitor steal His corse away
Out of that place:
For if they do, truly I say
Ye die in disgrace.

PRIMUS MILES

Yes, Sir Pilate, for certain
We shall keep Him with all our main:
No traitor shall come with his train
To steal Him so:
Sir knights take up your gear again,
And let us go.

[*Here the tableau curtains drop and the* SOLDIERS *appear on the front stage on their way to the Sepulchre. Meanwhile the middle stage is cleared of properties.*

SECUNDUS MILES

Yes, certes, we are all here won,
We shall Him keep for your renown:
On every side let us sit down
In warlike gear:
And I shall seek to crack his crown,
Whoe'er comes here.

PRIMUS MILES

Who should be where, fain would I know?

SECUNDUS MILES

Even on this side will I go.

TERCIUS MILES

And I shall seek his feet to throw.

QUARTUS MILES

Beshrew him there!
Now, by Mahound, fain would I know
Who durst come here.

This corse with treason for to take
Whoever tries his crown I'll break.
From me stiffly he'll get a stroke
By this my hand:
Until three days are overtook
This corse I will command.

[*Here the* SOLDIERS *sleep. Then the* ANGELS *sing "Christus Resurgens." Then* JHESUS *speaks.*

Earthly man, that I have wrought,
Quickly wake, and sleep thou nought:
With bitter bail I have thee sought,
To make thee free:
Into this dungeon deep I sought
And all for love of thee.

Behold how dear I would thee buy:
My wounds are wet and all bloody:

Thee, sinful man, full dear bought I
With grief and pain :
Then live no more so sinfully
Now thou art clean.

Clean have I made thee, sinful man,
With woe and torture I thee won,
From heart and side the blood outran,
Such was My pain.
Thou must Me love that thus gave then
My life for thine.

Thou sinful man that by Me gaze
Quick unto Me now turn thy face :
Behold My body in this place
How it did quake :
Mark each wound and blood-stained trace,
Man, for thy sake.

With cords new, and ropes tough,
The Jews fell on My limbs so rough,
For that I had not paid enough
For thee before :
With hard pains these deep wounds
Had I therefore.

A crown of thorns, so sharp and keen,
They set upon My head for tene,
Two thieves they hanged, with Me between
All for despite :
Their pain, thou shouldst know well, thus fell
To set thee right.

"RESURRECCIO DOMINI"

Behold My shanks and My knee,
Mine arms and My thigh:
Behold Me well, what dost thou see
But sorrow and pain?
Thus was I spilt, man, for thy guilt,
Not for Mine.

And once more understand you shall:
Instead of drink they gave Me gall,
With vinegar 'twas mixed withal
By the Jews fell.
The pain I have endured to save
Man's soul from hell.

Behold My body, how Jews would throng
With knots of whips and scourges strong:
As many streams of blood out-sprang
On every side:
Knots where they hit, well mayest thou wit,
Made wounds wide.

And therefore thou shalt understand
In body, head, feet, and hand
Four hundred wounds and five thousand
Here mayest thou see:
And wounds were given and dealt full even
For love of thee.

Behold, nought else is left to do,
But rather than that thou shouldst go
All these pains did I undergo,
For thee did die:

Here mayest thou see that I love thee,
Man, faithfully.

Since I for love, man, bought thee dear,
As thou thyself mayest see it here,
I pray thee heartily, with good cheer,
Love Me again :
Since it pleased Me that I for thee
Endured this pain.

If thou a life of sin hast led,
Mercy to ask be not afraid :
The least drop I for thee have bled
Might cleanse full soon
All the sin the world within
That thou hadst done.

I was more wrath with false Judas
For that he would not ask for grace,
Than I was for his trespass
When he Me sold :
I was ready to show mercy,
But he was cold.

Lo how I hold Mine arms abroad,
To save thee ready made :
Such great love to thee I had,
Well mayest thou know !
Some love again I would full fain
Thou wouldst Me show.

Love, nought else do I ask of thee,
But that thou seekest from sin to flee,
And learn to live in charity
Both night and day:
Then in My bliss thou shalt not miss
To dwell alway.

For I am very Prince of peace,
And sin's sorrow I may release,
And whoso will from sins now cease
And mercy cry,
I grant them here, in every Mass,
In bread Mine own body.

And that same very bread of life
Becomes My flesh in words five:
Whoso receives in sin or strife
Is dead for ever:
But whoso takes in righteous life
Shall die never.

(In the original this verse was crossed out in red ink, probably after the Reformation.)

[*The Voice ceases. Enter the three* MARIES

MARIA MAGDALENE

Alas! Am I like to die outright!
In the world was never a wofuller wight,
I droop, I fly from such a sight
As that I see;
My Lord, who was so great of might
Is gone from me.

Alas! That I should see His pain,
Or that from me His life was ta'en
For every sore He was medicine,
And cure of all.
Mankind for help, aye and again,
To Him would call.

MARIA JACOBI

Alas! How stand I on my feet?
When I think on His wounds wet!
Jhesus, that was in love so sweet,
And never did ill,
Is dead, and buried under grit,
By evil will.

MARIA SALOMEE

Without a cause was Jhesus ta'en
These lusty lords they have Him slain,
And trespass did He never none,
In any sted:
To whom shall we now make our moan?
Our Lord is dead.

MARIA MAGDALENE

Since He is dead, my sisters dear,
Let us go with all good cheer.
And with our ointments fair and clear
That we have brought,
To Anoint His wounds here,
The Jews have wrought.

MARIA JACOBI

Go we then, my sisters free,
For sore I long His corpse to see,
But I know not what best may be:
Help have we none,
And which of all we sisters three
Shall move the stone?

[*Here two* ANGELS *enter and sit on the tomb.*

MARIA SALOMEE

I fear me we may not do so
For it is high, and heavy also.

MARIA MAGDALENE

Sisters, we need no further go,
Nor make mourning:
I see two sit where we wend to,
In white clothing.

MARIA JACOBI

Certes, the truth is not to hide,
The grave-stone is put aside.

MARIA SALOMEE

Certes, whatever may betide,
Now will we wend
To seek His love, and with Him bide,
Who was our friend.

PRIMUS ANGELUS

Ye women mourning in your thought
Here in this place whom have ye sought?

MARIA MAGDALENE

Jhesu that unto death was brought,
Our Lord so free.

SECUNDUS ANGELUS

Certes, women, here is nought:
Come near and see.

PRIMUS ANGELUS

He is not here, the truth to say,
The place is void wherein He lay:
The cere-cloth here see ye may
Was on Him laid:
He is risen and gone His way,
As He you said.

SECUNDUS ANGELUS

Even as He said so done hath He,
Risen through Divinity:
He shall be found in Galilee,
In flesh and well:
To His disciples now wend ye
And thus them tell.

MARIA MAGDALENE

My sisters free, since it is so,
That He is risen from death and woe,
As said to us these angels two,
Our Lord and leech,
As ye have heard, where'er you go
Look that you preach.

MARIA JACOBI

As we have heard so shall we say:
Mary, our sister, have good day!

MARIA MAGDALENE

Now very God, as well He may,
Man most of might,
We wish you, sisters, well on your way,
And rule ye right.

Alas, now what shall hap to me?
My caitiff heart will break in three
When that I think of that body
How It was spoilt:
Through feet and hands nailèd was He
Who had no guilt.

Without guilt then was He ta'en,
That lovely Lord, they have Him slain,
And trespass did He never none,
No, not amiss:
It was my guilt which gave Him pain,
And nothing His.

Can I repay such love so sweet
That for me suffered wounds wet,
And then was buried under feet,
Such love He had?
There is nothing till we meet
May make me glad.

[*Here the women go out and the* SOLDIERS *awake.*

PRIMUS MILES

Out, alas! What shall I say?
Where is the corpse that herein lay?

SECUNDUS MILES

What ails the man? He is away
That we should tend!

PRIMUS MILES

Rise up and see.

SECUNDUS MILES

Harrow! Thief! For aye
This is our end!

TERCIUS MILES

What devil ails you two
Such noise and cry! What is't ye say?

SECUNDUS MILES

He is gone!

TERCIUS MILES

Alas, who?

SECUNDUS MILES

He that here lay.

TERCIUS MILES

Harrow! Devil! How got He thus away?

QUARTUS MILES

What? Could He thus disappear,
The false traitor who was here,
When we the guard in warlike gear
Had underta'en?
Certes each one of us here
Shall now be slain.

PRIMUS MILES

Alas, what shall I do this day
Since this traitor has gone away?
And safely, sirs, I dare well say
He rose alone.

SECUNDUS MILES

Tell Sir Pilate of this affray,
We must begone.

QUARTUS MILES

Know ye well He rose indeed?

SECUNDUS MILES

I myself saw that He did.

PRIMUS MILES

When He arose from out the dead
None could ken.

QUARTUS MILES

Alas, hard hap is on my head
Among all men.

[*Here the front tableau curtains drop and the* SOLDIERS *appear on the apron stage.*

TERCIUS MILES

Go, tell Sir Pilate of this deed,
How that He rose from out the dead.
We must forfeit without dread
All that we have.

We must invent, for there is need
Ourselves to save.

PRIMUS MILES

That I know well, so I shall go.

SECUNDUS MILES

And I assent thereto also.

TERCIUS MILES

A thousand came with much ado,
A well-armed train,
And took His corpse. We let them go
Else we were slain.

QUARTUS MILES

Nay, certainly I hold it good
To say the truth right as it stood,
How that He rose in mighty mood
And went His way:
To Sir Pilate, if it be good,
Thus will I say.

PRIMUS MILES

And darest thou to Sir Pilate go
With these tidings, and tell him so?

SECUNDUS MILES

This tale let us three tell also.
We die but once.

TERCIUS MILES ET OMNES

Now He that brought us all this woe,
Woe worth His bones.

QUARTUS MILES

Go we then, sir knights of grace,
Let us towards Sir Pilate pace.
There we may the story trace
How it did pass.

PRIMUS MILES

There I shall the truth outface
Right as it was.

[*They go out. The tableau curtains rise disclosing* PILATE'S *palace. Enter the* SOLDIERS.

PRIMUS MILES

Sir Pilate, prince without a peer,
Sir Cayaphas and Anna here,
And all the lords about you there,
Each by his name:
Mahound you save from woe and fear,
From sin and shame.

PILATUS

Welcome, our knights so bold,
Much mirth now may ye hold.
But here to us the tale unfold
How ye have wrought.

PRIMUS MILES

Our watching, lord, was dead and cold,
'Tis brought to nought.

CAYAPHAS

To nought? Alas, how say ye so?

SECUNDUS MILES

The prophet Jhesu, whom you know,
Is risen, and from us did go
With main and might.

PILATUS

Then to the devil thou shalt go,
Vile recreant knight!

What! Dastard cowards I ye call!
To let Him pass thus from us all!

TERCIUS MILES

Sir, we dared do nought at all
At that dread sight.

QUARTUS MILES

We were so feared that we did fall,
And shook in fright.

PRIMUS MILES

We were so frightened, everyone,
When that He put aside the stone,
We quaked for fear. There stirred not one,
Shamed through and through!

PILATUS

Why, rose He by Himself alone?

SECUNDUS MILES

Yea, lord, and it is true.

We never heard, at night or morn,
Nor our fathers, before us born,
Such melody, midday or morn,
As the air there bore.

PILATUS

Alas, then are our laws forlorn
For evermore!

The devil! Where shall all this lead?
This world now fares but ill indeed:
Council, Cayaphas, we need
Of this affray.

CAYAPHAS

Sir, could I the mystery read,
Fain would I say.

ANNA

Sir, I answer to your call:
It shall be profit for us all.
Yon knights their words must now recall
How He arose:
We would, for aught that might befall,
That no man knows.

And therefore, in your curtesy,
Pay them, here, and presently.

PILATUS

With this advice so pleased am I,
It shall be thus.
Sir knights, that are of deeds doughty,
Take heed to us.

Hearken now how ye shall say,
Where'er you go, by night or day,
Ten thousand men in good array
Came there to kill,
And thievishly took His corpse away
Against your will.

Say ye thus in every land,
And receive with this command
Ten thousand pounds, here, in your hand
As your reward;
And my friendship, understand
Shall not be spared.
But look ye say as now ye know.

PRIMUS MILES

Aye, or Mahound may strike me low,
In every place shall we say so
By night or day.
Where'er we wend, where'er we go,
Thus shall we say.

PILATUS

The blessing of Mahound be with you night and day!

The Tableau curtains close upon PILATE'S *Court.* CHRIST THE GARDENER *and* MARIA MAGDALENE *meet on the front stage*

MARIA MAGDALENE

Tell me, gardener, I thee pray,
If thou didst bare my Lord away:
Tell me the truth, say me not nay,
Where that He lies,
And I shall remove Him if I may,
In any wise.

JHESUS

Woman, why weepest thou? Be still!
Whom seekest thou? Tell Me thy will,
Deny Me not with nay

MARIA MAGDALENE

Since for His loss I feel full ill,
The place where His body lyeth still
Tell me I pray;
If that I may His body bare with me,
Unto my dying day the better should I be.

JHESUS

Woman, woman, turn thy thought!
Wot thee well I hid Him not,
Nor bare Him away with Me:
Go seek! Look if thou findest Him out.

MARIA MAGDALENE

In faith I have Him sought,
But never found is He.

JHESUS

Why, what was He to thee? In truthfulness now say.

MARIA MAGDALENE

He was so much to me no longer may I stay.

JHESUS

Mary, thou seekest thy God, and I am He.

MARIA MAGDALENE

Hail! Rabbi! My Lord, so dear!
Now am I whole, since Thou art here.
Suffer me to touch Thee near
And to kiss Thy feet:
Might I do so, how well it were,
For Thou art sweet.

JHESUS

Nay, Mary, now touch not Me,
For to My Father I tell thee
Arisen have I not;
Tell My brethren I shall be
Before them all in Trinity
Whose will now have I wrought.
To peace now are they bought, that prisoned were in pain
Wherefore thank thou in thought God, thy Lord and Mine.

Mary, thou shalt from Me go,
With My favour sheltered so,
That thou shalt never fall;
To My disciples say you so,
Who go so sad and wrapped in woe,
For I shall succour all.
Peter shalt thou call, and say that I shall be
Before him and them all, Myself, in Galilee.

MARIA MAGDALENE

Lord, I shall make my voyage
To tell them hastily;
When they shall hear that message
They all shall be merry.

[*Exit* JHESUS.

This Lord was slain, alas, the day
Falsely slain, no man knows why
Or where He did amiss;

But with Him spake I bodily,
And so am filled with bliss.

My bliss is come, my care has gone,
My Love I have now met alone:
I am as blithe in blood and bone
As ever yet was wight:
He has risen who to death was done,
My heart is light.

I am as light as leaf on tree,
For the joyful sight that I did see,
For well I know that it was He
My Lord Jhesu:
He that betrayed his God so free
Sore may he rue.

To Galilee now will I fare,
And His disciples free from care:
I trow that they will mourn no more,
Now there comes their bliss;
That worthy child that Mary bare
May He amend your miss.

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Printed in England [illegible] *Viney, Ltd.*

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